CHAPTER FIVE

On anti-Iraq war protests and the global news sphere

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As social protests have become transnationalized, so too have the media platforms on which they play out. They have become mediatized: designed with media in mind and dependent on media for their success--none more so perhaps than the anti-war protest movement. One could say that globalized anti-war expression came of age with the world protests of post-9/11 US military action in Afghanistan and Iraq, particularly the globally coordinated and boundary-spanning protests by millions of people on February 15, 2003, which anticipated the unilateral decision of the Bush Administration to invade Iraq in March. Called the largest mass protest in history, the rally in Rome was considered at the time as the largest single anti-war rally. One participant in New York was quoted as saying "I came to go to the rally and be a part of a *global voice* against going to war against Iraq again." (McFadden 2003) A combination of faith groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions and peace groups have mobilized since 2002 to become perhaps the largest anti-war movement in history. A global-scale movement like this one engages a similarly globally-scaled media, but we are only just beginning to understand that dynamic relationship. In this chapter, I consider how to approach this transnational phenomenon in light of the global journalism supporting it.

As a social phenomenon, protests are the visible and concrete face of public opinion, and no longer merely a local expression but one that is globally directed. Whether with war or other issues, we need to ask what happens when both protests and media become global--and how the relationship changes between them and with policy makers? What are the prospects for social protest in this new media environment, especially protest against state actors with their own agenda and framing power? Certainly, these transnational links help invigorate the global public sphere, where the military policy of superpowers is more subject to critique than ever before. The world watches as the media cover globally staged and coordinated public events.

When considering transnational protests, anti-war movements can easily be grouped with other global issues, whether humanitarian, ecological, or anti-authoritarian. These movements and their various public actions are often inter-connected ideologically, with anti-(economic) globalization protestors, for example, finding common cause with anti-nuclear and environmental groups. The terrain of political struggle in the world has become "global" in the sense proposed by Hardt and Negri (2000) that these struggles have become economic, political, and cultural, all at once. Struggles in Tiananmen Square, the Los Angeles riots, Chiapas, and the Intifada, are all particular to their specific situation; they aren't commensurable in the sense of worker revolutions that find a common internationalist language but have in common the fact that they do speak to global forces with which each grapples. In Hardt and Negri's conception of "Empire," these movements take on meaning as a group only as they pass through the level of global citizenship more generally. Thus, they jump to the supranational, global level, without linking up horizontally with corresponding local movements.

Taken as a whole or separately, the transnational coordination of these issue-movements and emerging transnational media platforms give these groups a larger voice than would have been the case otherwise. The issue of war, however, raises its own particular concerns. International conflict has always been with us, but when carried out by super-powers like the US, wars have been rapid-onset issues that have provoked the strongest and most concentrated public opposition. Anti-authoritarian regime protests may bring international pressure to bear and hasten political change, and pro-environmental or human rights demonstrations may put issues on the table that hadn't been there before. In the case of anti-war protests, however, they face national policies that have already been set in motion. Wars by superpowers are energetically promoted by their instigators and sold with their own narrative support, a discourse that must be confronted by opponents if they are to be successful. Anti-war protests, then, take place within a more explicit framing context with which they must contend.

The globalized anti-war movement demonstrates an important development in the flow of political influence through transnational networks--and in recent years shows evidence of having significant political consequences. National elites must increasingly take world opinion into account, since their own citizens are part of those networks and have easy access to coverage of major events. This extends beyond the old conception of the "CNN-effect," where the media spotlight causes actions by raising awareness of a particular humanitarian concern in the world. The anti-war movement represents a specific political struggle, changing the balance of power between state actors and citizens. Although dissent seemed easily marginalized two decades ago in the days of Desert Storm, the 1991 US-led conflict with Iraq, the more diffused current media environment does not permit such easy dismissal of the public voice. The protest of the more recent Iraq invasion of 2003 revealed a widespread opposition to American military policy and had serious political fallout. Certainly, in Spain and the UK, national policy was at odds with public opinion--contributing in the case of the Spanish election of 2004 to the rejection of the prime minister in favor of an anti-war candidate.

The levels through which this political influence flows have been redistributed, through a combination of changing media platforms and transnational organizing. Social protest has traditionally been understood within the political context of the host culture, and in earlier days the idea of anti-war protest was relatively straightforward. Public expressions of social protest would be staged in hopes of influencing local and national officials. Whether public demonstrations were intended for local or distant policy makers, it was possible to trace the lines of influence more easily. During the anti-Vietnam War protests, US university campuses were the sites of regular demonstrations, which were designed to affect local institutions but also play to a national audience. In 1967, for example, students at the University of Wisconsin sought to prevent Dow Chemical company, the maker of napalm, from recruiting on campus, a position that nested within a larger national political movement. Of course, the North Vietnamese leadership was well aware of US protests against the war and regarded them as an important political asset in their own strategic planning. The primary audience for such demonstrations, however, was the university, the corporate programs it hosted, and the national administration. The anti-war message had a very specific political objective within the host culture. Now these expressions are staged for a more wide-spread audience.

Protests and national frames
Anti-war protests must contend with the political issue culture that was exploited to launch military action in the first place. As Smith (2005) argues from a cultural sociology perspective,

cultural codes are invoked to legitimize military action. War is not just something that elites decide to do, with the help of public relations techniques. They make use of pre-existing cultural resources and genres of interpretation to mobilize support. The most extreme genre, "apocalyptic," pushes the good and bad guys to their most divergent and, according to Smith, is the only narrative capable of mobilizing mass support for warfare by making it culturally acceptable. But it is also most susceptible to being deflated when factual discrepancies are discovered. As an expression of power, wars happen when policy actors successfully align their goals with favorable cultural codes. Thus, the anti-war movements have had to assert a counter-narrative if they are to successfully derail decisions to move toward military action. These counter-frames are developed as movements interact with media routines and systems, with the transnational dimension helping to destabilize the "good guys/bad guys" distinction and highlight issues of factual discrepancy.

The US conflicts with Iraq since 1990 show the changing role of media coverage from the CNN video-war period of Desert Storm to the much more globalized news environment of the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq in 2003. Social protest against these conflicts has confronted greatly different news cultures in the period spanning the two conflicts. The Persian Gulf War of 1991 provided the most dramatic example until then of war as spectacle, with the media strongly implicated in its construction (Kellner 1992). The merits of the decision to use military force to push Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait took a back seat to the dramatic emphasis on the showdown between the first President Bush and Hussein, the setting of a January 15th deadline for withdrawal, and the use of high-tech weapons once war was launched. The media seemed disturbingly pro-war in the logic of coverage, relying on military officials and former military figures to help frame the conflict to the exclusion of opposition and peace groups. In spite of seeking UN approval, this seemed more like a rubber stamp, with the international community taking a back seat to White House decision-making. Ultimately, the introduction of foreign troops into Saudi Arabia sowed the seeds of Islamic extremists' resentment toward the US role in the Middle East, but this and other issues of historical context figured little in media coverage.

Within that context, the Desert Storm period featured a predictable marginalization of protest to the war. Research on news coverage of anti-war protest within a specific geographical community revealed frames that managed the protest within comfortable ideological boundaries, particularly in making it difficult to disentangle criticism of the policy from the support for American troops. Anti-war protests had a difficult time combating the narrative of the administration (Reese 2004; Reese and Buckalew 1995). Since Desert Storm, however, new more global communities have become crucial venues for protest.

The attacks by Al-Qaeda in 2001 against targets in New York and Washington, D.C., dramatically demonstrated the globalization of war itself and the importance of non-state actors. When the administration of George W. Bush framed the post-9/11 military strategy as the Global War on Terror, the narrative became irresistible to the US press. The frame located the conflicts within a war between good and evil, a Manichaean struggle between the forces of freedom and enslavement. Depicting the enemy as the Axis of Evil connected the policy to the "Good War" of World War II and the axis powers of Japan and Nazi Germany. By depicting the enemy as an undifferentiated threat, the War on Terror provided the discursive foundation for linking the attacks on September 11th to Iraq, rendering it what Bush would term a "vital front" in the larger conflict.

This frame was widely adopted through the US press, in spite of its flaws as a guide for policy (Lewis and Reese 2008; Reese and Lewis 2009). Even within the national security community, Record (2003) argued that the Global War on Terror's insistence on moral clarity lacked strategic focus, that its open-ended quest for absolute security is not politically sustainable and risks involving the military in conflicts it is not designed to fight, much less win. Former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski (2004) argued similarly. Critics on the left regarded it as a front for an imperialistic project (Chomsky 2002), feared its threat to a greater sense of "world community," or more generally rejected what they saw as an unconditional and uncritical celebration of American life (e.g. Falk 2002). Framing terrorism as the global equivalent of a hijacking brackets off criticism of state actors as they reassert their authority in dealing with threats to security, and state-sponsored terrorism is excluded from consideration (see also Reese 2010a).

In the post-9/11 launching of the "Global War on Terror" by the Bush administration, selling the policy met with success domestically, marshaling the support of the US public and leading a majority of them to believe that Saddam Hussein was behind the 9/11 attacks. Although, the decisions to go to war must be sold at home they also quickly become important centerpieces of global discourse as well. Within the global community issue frames will always be more multi-lateral, with non-US journalists more likely to challenge the administration discourse with less parochial perspectives. Compared to previous periods, the emerging global news arena made it more difficult for the US to monopolize the coverage, and the wide dissemination of global protest activities made this much more clear.

The narratives of the various sides in conflicts are now more available. Certainly, the presence of news outlets like the Qatar-based satellite network Al-Jazeera makes it less likely that the "enemy" would remain faceless, and the sanitization of battle that characterized Desert Storm was not as easy in the second Gulf War, the US-led Iraq invasion. Scenes of civilian casualties and property damage made information-management more difficult for administration officials seeking to maintain public support at home and beyond.

In the case of Bush policies and military interventions, these decisions have not been well received outside the country, as indicated by international polling trends. At the same time the War on Terror was being effectively sold at home, the rest of the world was rapidly loosing confidence in the US and its policies. Poll results from the Pew Center Global Attitudes Project show that world opinion toward the US slipped considerably during the Bush years. The US brand in general and the perception that American influence was a positive force in the world slipped during that decade but has shown signs of revival with the election of President Obama, a much more popular figure in Europe and most of the rest of the world. It's a logical inference to attribute those differences to the kinds of policies promoted in the Bush years, particularly the tendency to go it alone in environmental and military decisions, with relatively little regard for multi-lateral global cooperation. Perhaps it wasn't surprising that in claiming for itself a unique role in the right to launch unilaterally preemptive military action, the US image suffered in a more globally distributed court of public opinion. The precipitous decline in poll numbers further suggests that the global media played a part in amplifying the disquiet, allowing the resentments and suspicions toward the US to quickly find a broader audience. That, of course, leads to asking what is the nature of that global platform now?

We don't yet clearly know how issues aired through global news discourses circulate back into national spheres. If it was up to the rest of the world, President Obama would be reelected handily judging from the broad support he received in the global "electoral college" (an

analysis provided by *The Economist* magazine on November 4, 2008). But in the increasingly polarized political climate in the US, the right-wing eagerly pounces on any suggestions of lack of patriotism. When 2004 candidate John Kerry, for example, proposed that policies be mindful of international legitimacy and meet the "global test," he was roundly rebuked for surrendering national prerogatives. The world doesn't have veto power over US decisions, but in a globalized public sphere those decisions and their legitimacy will be more closely scrutinized than ever. Indeed, that 2004 election pointed to an important fault line between US and world opinion. In order to be politically successful, American leaders may need to take nationalistic positions that don't resonate well with the rest of the world. But the American public is also able to receive news from the rest of the world and may become more aware of world opinion as a political consideration. This notion is part of a larger hope for "media globalization," that it may support a more cosmopolitan "global village" public sphere, which will mitigate against conflicts based on nationalistic urges.

Media globalization

Understanding the new context for anti-war protests requires understanding the media environment in which they take place. Because their intended audience is global they play an important role in the transnational flow of information through new systems of global journalism. The crucial aspect of a globalized journalism is not some vast scale but that the news source, producer, and audience no longer necessarily share the same national frame of reference. If that is the case, then by what logic is this journalism guided? Understanding the role of transnational protests in this kind of media environment requires an understanding of the global news sphere and its changing relationships to political structures.

The great interest from communication scholars in "media globalization" suggests the tight relationship between media and the globalization process, each reinforcing the other. This has led to high expectations for international journalism in producing a global public sphere, where world issues can be clearly understood and responded to with a strengthened sense of global consciousness. A few clearly transnational news forms have emerged, particularly in the form of satellite news networks like CNN. Among print media, business-oriented media such as the *International Herald Tribune*, *Wall St. Journal Europe* and the *Financial Times* have been particularly effective in claiming this role given the global appeal and portability of commerce. Otherwise, media globalization skeptics argue that no truly transnational news platforms have emerged, permitting the kind of cross-boundary dialogs associate with a public sphere (e.g., Sparks 2007). Indeed, critics like Kai Hafez suggest that regional enclaves, linguistic divides, and parochial zones of ethnocentric discourse have become even more sharply defined (Hafez 2007). Such skeptics point to the continued weaknesses of international reporting: elite-focused, conflict-based, and focused on scandal and the sensational. World events are processed through the same national filters as before, leading them to conclude that the "global village" has been blocked by domestication (reviewed in Reese 2010b).

Emerging global news platforms have tempted others to regard them as a new and separate "space." Volkmer (1999) theorized that global political communication (into which she groups CNN, Al-Jazeera, and extra-territorial Chinese websites) feeds a correspondingly global public sphere, which in turn yields global civil society, where communication is made possible not otherwise available at the national level. I'm more inclined to agree with Hjarvard (2001), who argues that there is no new autonomous zone that we may call the global public sphere, operating in parallel with existing national spheres. The globalization of the public sphere is a process, in which national zones have become deterritorialized and connected in new ways. The

media role in all of this should not be narrowly regarded as the specific message, medium, or audience--the "CNN version" of media globalization. In the case of journalism, I go so far as to picture a "global news arena" as the visible face of these systemic changes in global interconnectivity (Reese 2008).

The entire world need not be tuned into the same news broadcast, or news products need not become completely homogenized, for us to say that the media system has become more in tune with itself. One perceives the "world as a single place"--the central image of globalization--in the sense that there is an increasingly well defined agenda of news and issues circulating around the globe. Shifts in the attention of the world press now take place at a rapid pace, with various national, regional, and local media reacting to and expanding on what is available in a new capacity for mutual awareness and reflexivity. This reconfigured and expanded world news grid has become dramatically apparent in recent years, especially when powered to the highest levels with major events such as September 11, terrorist actions designed as the ultimate global media event.

Globalizing impulses

The media globalization debates have centered on whether a truly global news sphere is emerging, permitting undistorted opportunities for cross-boundary dialogs. By focusing on the media system and its audiences, skeptics argue that no such sphere has or likely will emerge in the new term. People prefer their own national fare, and linguistic divides prevent much cross-culture platforms, other than for the privileged elite who travel easily and consume the global news content intended for them. But there are other globalizing impulses that work to support a more supra-national expression, including the anti-war movement and related protests. "Global" in this context refers to the cross-border and deterritorialized aspect rather than a particularly huge scale. Global protests, as coordinated expression, serve as a centripetal force for the world news agenda, operating against the domestication of the issues into the various national spheres.

Journalists themselves are globalizing, beyond the traditional "foreign correspondents," even if we cannot easily classify a special group of "global journalists" [although the phrase can make for a compelling label (Reese 2001; Weaver 1998)]. Even when away from home journalists continue for the most part to work on behalf of a specific national audience, and domesticate their coverage accordingly. Coverage, for example, of such international events as world political summits led Hallin and Mancini (1992) to observe how rooted journalists still are in country and professional culture. They go on to suggest, however, that greater global-level cohesion among journalists will emerge when more international institutions develop for journalists to congregate around, such as now is the case with financial reporting, centered as it is around commonly understood world economic structures (Corcoran and Fahy 2009). Beyond these new formal structures, they suggest that major events of global interest may propel newsgathering toward a more globally coordinated journalism.

Much has happened since they made those observations, and the number of such global events has increased steadily. The scale of world anti-war protests certainly fit this criterion. Hallin and Mancini suggest that international political summits, by drawing together world journalists, generate a dialogue that may be considered a quasi-international public sphere and that the institutionalization of the world press corps plays a highly visible--if symbolic role--in such events. Globally organized anti-war protest don't have the same official underpinnings but may have the same result, especially when organized in tandem with such events as G8 summits of major political leaders or the World Economic Forum. From the standpoint of the anti-war

movement, coordinators hope that journalists covering such protests would approach the issue with a broader professional and cosmopolitan mindset than just reflecting their respective national news cultures.

The extent to which these global anti-war events are translated into a respectful hearing in the world press will ultimately be indicated by the kind of news coverage that results. Indeed, research has begun to consider the extent to which news contains certain intrinsically global issues and perspectives (Berglez 2008). Others have looked more specifically at the content of explicitly "global" satellite news media like CNN International and BBC World, finding that these programs contained frames with the potential to move beyond "dominance" to cultural recognition—acknowledging and affirming cultural differences (Cottle and Rai 2008). To the extent that national media and others in the global media hierarchy take their cues from such organizations, and their relatively more cosmopolitan outlook, perhaps the globalized anti-war message will find a more supportive platform than in any one country itself. Of course, others emphasize that global news agencies and satellite networks are prey to the same superficial and sensationalistic tendencies as any national media (Paterson 2001; Thussu and Freedman 2003) but this is something to sort out further in future studies.

The anti-war movement connects to other organized movements for economic justice, human rights, and environmental protection. As the array of issues with global dimensions grows, so does the importance of the layer of civil society represented by NGOs. These organizations play an important coordinating function in promoting a vigorous transnational message, but this important zone of interstitial influence between government and corporate structures has received scarcely any scholarly attention. As Cottle and Nolan (2007) point out, the NGOs have adapted to the same media logic that affects other competers for the media spotlight, especially in the increasingly crowded humanitarian aid field. The use of celebrities and compelling visuals makes it more likely that an NGO's brand will be established effectively. In the case of the anti-war movement, organized protests are usually formed by a coalition of such groups finding common cause.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to combine two concerns, one grounded in research and the other more speculative. In the first case, I have observed how easy it is for anti-war dissent to be marginalized by the mainstream media, rooted as they are in conflict-oriented, sensationalistic coverage which relies heavily on officials and the military establishment for framing issues of war. These are long-standing concerns, but the question now is whether the new transnational media environment will disrupt these tendencies and pave the way for new ones. Although the Iraq War launched in 2003 took place within a broader, more vigorous global media environment, US journalists still absorbed the national frame of reference promoted by the Bush administration and embodied in the phrase: "Global War on Terror." Even serious national-level print journalists seemed all too willing to view the conflict as "us vs. them," and "good vs. evil," a perspective that helped provide the rationale for the invasion of Iraq as a continuing response to 9/11.

The US media may have bought into the official rationale for the Iraq invasion, but the rest of the world, guided in part by new media voices such as Al-Jazeera, was less likely to go along. A casual reading of the world press following 9/11 suggests that a number of national regimes found the War on Terror a strategically valuable frame for their own needs. The Russians claimed they were in a War on Terror against Chechnyan separatists, the Israelis said the same about the Palestinians, and various Asian governments could find their own targets of

"terrorists" in political opponents. But citizens in general appeared less likely to accept the organizing principle of the War on Terror, as suggested by the steadily slipping image for the US and enthusiasm for the candidacy of Barack Obama, who avoided the phrase and favored greater engagement, even with pariah states like Iran.

Here it is still a matter of speculation, but there is evidence that the global news arena made for a more hospitable climate for globally coordinated anti-war protests. The centripetal tendencies of journalism professionalism and the promotion of events by inter-locking NGO interests made it more likely that these protests would be received as they were intended, as a pro-peace, anti-militarism message--transcending any one national policy context where it could be easily marginalized as a less-than-patriotic discourse. More research is needed to determine what kind of environment the globalized media will ultimately provide for this kind of public expression, especially concerning such momentous issues as war and peace.

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